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C O N F I D E N T I A L TIRANA 000146

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TAGS: [PARM](#) [PGOV](#) [MASS](#) [PREL](#) [AL](#)
SUBJECT: DEMILITARIZATION: GRADUAL PROGRESS BUT REMAINING ISSUES

REF: A) 2008 TIRANA 775 B) 2008 TIRANA 814

Classified By: DCM Stephen Cristina for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶11. (C) Summary. On February 26-27, PM/WRA Senior Advisor Mark Adams visited Tirana to review progress on Albania's demilitarization efforts and to meet with Defense Minister Oketa. There has been recent positive progress, although several issues remain. To date, the Defense Minister has not signed the National Demilitarization Plan developed last summer, and some within the MoD are using this as an excuse to drag their feet on execution. Of the two major industrial demil facilities, one (Mjekes) is finally running (dismantling around 800 rounds per day), and Oketa stated that the second (Polican) should start soon. Oketa again requested U.S. assistance in upgrading Polican. Although the MoD is determined to start open detonation at eight designated sites on April 1, MoD staff may not be ready by then. EUCOM is offering training to that end. But there is concern of bribery in the MoD's selection of officers for that training. Cleanup of Gerdec is gradually progressing and Oketa has decided to destroy munitions from Gerdec by open detonation once they are released by the Prosecutor General. Lastly, Adams shared with Oketa his vision of long-term demil assistance through the NATO Maintenance and Supply Agency (NAMSA). End summary.

NATIONAL DEMIL PLAN

¶12. (C) In June 2008, U.S. contractor Cubic helped Defense Minister Oketa to prepare a National Demil Plan, which Oketa then presented to international donors (ref a). However, near the end of 2008, when criticized for foot-dragging on the National Demil Plan, General Staff J4 staff responded that there is no National Demil Plan because the DefMin had never signed it. Since then, J4 staff has written their own National Demil Plan which generally follows Cubic's previous plan. However, when asked on Feb 27 by Adams, Oketa responded that it still has not been signed because officers had requested time to make some minor changes in figures in the plan. Obviously frustrated, Oketa turned to his assistant and in Albanian told him to tell the staff to provide Oketa with a finalized plan to sign and to stop dithering over numbers.

¶13. (C) Comment. The lack of a signed plan continues to be an excuse which J4 staff use to drag their feet on implementation. To be resolved, it will probably need continued external pressure. Post will follow up until it is resolved. End comment.

MJEKES AND POLICAN

¶4. (C) During the week of February 11, the MoD finally began industrial demil. Mjekes began working its 160mm line at near-to-full capacity (around 800 rounds per day). A planned second line at Mjekes is contingent on the Danish donation of two more band-saws, which the Danish have not yet been able to procure. Concerning Polican, Oketa reported to Adams that it should start as soon as possible, but that the MoD must first remove excess fuses left over from previous demil efforts. The U.S. contractor also told Poloff that local residents have complained about the noise of the furnace that will be used to destroy fuses, so the Polican management has agreed to build a casing for the furnace to reduce noise before demil starts. U.S. contractor remains worried that MoD staff continue to find reasons to stall in beginning the 82mm line at Polican. Post will continue to monitor.

¶5. (C) Oketa again raised concerns over the poor quality of the Polican facility and his inability to use MoD funds to upgrade Polican. Oketa suggested that as part of the contract between U.S. contractor Armor Group and the Polican facility, Armor Group could agree to advance pay Polican enough money to purchase equipment upgrades and that money could then be subtracted from future payments to Polican. Adams agreed to consider this option.

OPEN-AIR DETONATION

¶6. (C) Along with the two demil sites, MoD intends to begin open-air detonation of the most dangerous category of munitions at eight designated sites by April 1. To this end, EUCOM will offer brief munitions disposal training beginning March 11. Yet EUCOM EOD Advisor LTC Buckley has expressed

concern about the Albanian Armed Forces' (AAF) ability to be ready to conduct open-air detonation by then. It is also unclear if the sites will be ready and approved by the given date.

¶7. (C) Although attendance rosters were submitted weeks ago for the EUCOM training, last week, General Staff J4 submitted a revised list of attendees. Not only was this of concern because of the lack of time for vetting, even more worrisome was the fact that only four of the approximately 30 participants on the new list had received the AAF EOD preparatory training offered last month. It is allegedly common practice for AAF officers to "buy" their attendance in training that they will then use for their personal benefit. Post reported this corruption phenomenon in regards to Iraq deployments in ref b. Given the time constraints, the CHOD has sent an official request for a waiver of the vetting process.

GERDEC

¶8. (C) Cleanup of Gerdec continues. Armor Group and AAF have removed approximately 1,600 tons of munitions from the site. Of the reported 9,000 tons delivered to Gerdec before the explosion, Armor Group experts guess that 3,000 tons were probably completely destroyed, and 6,000 tons must be cleared. It is still unclear if the Prosecutor General has released the munitions for destruction. In any case, Oketa reported to Adams that his intention is to hold off on destruction of Gerdec munitions until the entire site has been cleared. He stated that NAMSA experts have advised him that open-air detonation of these munitions would be much safer than industrial demil. (Note. NAMSA expert Graham Goodrum has told Post that if the GOA requests NAMSA destroy the Gerdec munitions by industrial demil, he will refuse because of the danger. However, U.S. contractor Armor Group experts disagree and say that the greater danger is in transporting the munitions as there are no close detonation sites. End Note.)

¶9. (C) Oketa requested that Adams not change the agreement on Gerdec demil for now and left open the possibility of requesting Armor Group's assistance in the future. For the

time being, though, he stated that the GOA takes full responsibility for munitions recovered from Gerdec.

FUTURE NAMSA ASSISTANCE

¶110. (C) Adams also shared his vision for long-term demil assistance to Albania. NAMSA is currently preparing a proposal for demil assistance. Goodrum shared a preview of his thoughts with Ambassador. His hope is to establish two additional lines at Mjekes to handle up to 50,000 tons of demil. NAMSA could also run the incinerator it previously built at Mjekes to destroy SALW and fuses. Such a project would not likely start before the beginning of 2010.

¶111. (C) Goodrum noted that a big obstacle at Mjekes is the continued presence of 180 tons of RDX explosives and 80 tons of propellant at Area C at Mjekes, both in an unstable state. Were one of these to explode, it would wipe out the entire Mjekes facility. When Adams raised this issue with Oketa, Oketa noted that there is still debate in the MoD about selling the RDX. Oketa stated that he has verbally given his staff one week to find a buyer for the RDX after which he will issue the order for the RDX to be destroyed. When pushed, Oketa did not confirm that he had put this ultimatum in writing.

¶112. (C) Adams explained to Oketa his vision that over the next several years, US assistance would gradually shift away from bilateral (through Armor Group) and toward a NAMSA project that would oversee long-term demil assistance. In a previous conversation between Adams and Goodrum, Goodrum seemed open to expanding a NAMSA project to eventually include Polican. But Oketa did not see a need for two demil sites in the long-term and does not plan to continue to use Polican after the bulk of the National Plan is accomplished.

WITHERS